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ABSTRACT

This final report discusses the outcomes of a 4-year federally funded project designed to identify children in Montana who are deaf-blind and to provide training and technical assistance to improve the quality of special education and related services in Montana for children ages birth through 21 who are deaf-blind. The project was devised to meet the needs and concerns identified by families, service providers, and educators. These needs were transformed into six major Project goals: (1) public awareness; (2) identification of children who are deaf-blind; (3) provision of family services; (4) provision of technical assistance to service providers and educators; (5) community coordination and collaboration; and (6) project evaluation and management. By implementing objectives and activities in those goal areas, the Project helped to reach the following benefits: (1) families derived the benefits associated with early and accurate identification; (2) families accessed individualized supports that enabled them to carry out educational and therapeutic activities; (3) families were provided with the necessary information and support to advocate for school services; (4) families accessed current information and training opportunities on deaf-blindness; (5) service providers took greater advantage of resources available to support students who are deaf-blind; (6) service providers became more capable of delivering appropriate services to children who are deaf-blind; (7) the specialized services required became more integrated; (8) service providers continued to develop their skills and change their practices; and (9) teacher trainers infused information about the needs of students who are deaf-blind in preservice training curriculums for early intervention personnel. The report further discusses the context of

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the project; objectives; activities; problems encountered and solutions; and implications for policy, practice, and research. (CR)

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ED 437 765

# MONTANA'S IDEA SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH WITH DEAF-BLINDNESS PROJECT

**(State Project - 1a)**
**CFDA 84.025A - Grant #H025A50028**
**Final Report - 10/1/95 - 9/30/99**
**Performance Details for Last Reporting Period - 3/1/98 - 9/30/99**

## I. Executive Summary

The Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI), in collaboration with key agencies and organizations, provided training and technical assistance services to Montana families and public and private agencies involved with early identification, early intervention, educational, transitional, vocational, and related services for children with deaf-blindness. Through local agencies and schools, Montana provides direct early intervention and educational services for children with disabilities, including children who are deaf-blind, from birth through 21 years old. Thus, the Project's training and technical assistance services were designed to compliment the provision of Part C and Part B of IDEA services in Montana, enhance the services provided to children with deaf-blindness and their families, and increase the number of individuals in Montana who have expertise in services for individuals with deaf-blindness.

Importantly, the Project was devised to meet the needs and concerns identified by families, service providers and educators. These needs were transformed into six major Project goals: (a) public awareness; (b) identification of children who are deaf-blind; (c) provision of family services; (d) provision of technical assistance to service providers and educators; (e) community coordination and collaboration; and (f) project evaluation and management. By implementing objectives and activities in those goal areas, the Project helped to reach the following benefits for families, service providers and educators:

- families derived the benefits associated with early and accurate identification of their child as requiring supports and intervention for dual sensory impairment
- families accessed individualized supports that enabled them to carry out educational and therapeutic activities with their child in the context of natural routines of daily life
- families wee provided with the necessary information and support to advocate for necessary services for their child at school
- families accessed current information and training opportunities that focus on the needs of children and youth with deaf-blindness
- service providers became more aware of and took greater advantage of the resources available to support students who are deaf-blind
- service providers beame more capable of delivering appropriate services to children who are deaf-blind

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- the specialized services required as a result of dual sensory impairments became more integrated as part of the services provided to children on a daily basis
- service providers continued to develop their skills and change their practices to reflect new developments in the field
- teacher trainers infused information about the needs of students who are deaf-blind in the preservice training curriculum for early intervention personnel and teachers

The Project annually directly impacted over 50 families who have children with deaf-blindness, and over 250 early intervention service provider and education personnel.

## II. Project Summary

The Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI), collaborated with other key agencies and organizations to provide training and technical assistance services to Montana families and public and private agencies involved with early identification, early intervention, educational, transitional, vocational, and related services for children with deaf-blindness [according to 34 CFR Parts §307.11(a)(2), §307.11(c)(2) and §307.11(c)(3) in IDEA of 1995]. Montana provides direct early intervention and educational services for children with disabilities, including children who are deaf-blind, from birth through 21 years old. The Project's training and technical assistance services were designed to compliment the provision of Part C (formerly Part H) and Part B of IDEA services in Montana, enhance the services provided to children with deaf-blindness and their families, and increase the number of individuals in Montana who have expertise in services for individuals with deaf-blindness. In addition, this State Project was directly linked and coordinated with the Partnerships for Rural Resource Teams Project (optional pilot project) awarded to Montana's OPI.

Importantly, the State Project was implemented to meet the needs and concerns identified by families, service providers and educators. The needs assessments information was transformed into six major Project goals. By implementing objectives and activities in those goal areas, the Project provided benefits for families, service providers and educators that wee designed to meet the previously identified needs and concerns of the Project's key constituents. It was anticipated that the Project will annually directly impact 45 families who have children with deaf-blindness, 250 early intervention service provider and education personnel, and 50 adult service providers involved with transitional services. The Project goals were:

1. **Public Awareness**. To provide essential information to families, family support organizations, early intervention agencies, education facilities, medical facilities, professional organizations, and state agencies concerning services and resources for children who are deaf-blind and their families.

2. **Identification of Children who are Deaf-Blind**. To coordinate child find activities with other state agencies in order to seek out, identify and refer children who are or may be at risk of being deaf-blind.

3. **Family Services**. To provide technical assistance designed to facilitate family involvement in the education of children who are deaf-blind.

4. **Technical Assistance to Education and Service Provider Personnel**. To provide technical assistance designed to facilitate the implementation of best practices in the provision of education and related services for children who are deaf-blind.

5. **Community Coordination and Collaboration**. To promote interagency collaboration, coordination and development of resources devised to support children who are deaf-blind and their families in their schools and communities.

6. **Project Evaluation and Management**. To evaluate the impact of project activities on key constituents and to systematically manage the project based on evaluation information.

These Project goals were not modified during the course of implementing training and technical assistance services during the Project time period of October 1, 1995 through September 30, 1999. In accordance with the procedures for the Planning-Programming-Budgeting System (PPBS) described in the Plan of Operation (p.65) in the original grant proposal, each year the key personnel reviewed the goals, objectives and activities. Some modifications were made for specific objectives and activities.

Any noteworthy changes were outlined in previous annual performance reports. As noted in previous reports, the State of Montana did go through a restructuring that did impact other state services for people with disabilities. Thus, the identification of certain Departments in the original application, including the Project Goals and Objectives are not completely accurate. Several previously independent departments have been combined into a single department. The new inclusive agency is the Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS). The following list includes the name of the former department and its' new name as a division of DPHHS: Department of Corrections and Human Services' Mental Health Division for children services is now Division of Mental and Addictive Disorders; Department of Family Services is now Division of Child and Family Services; Department of Health and Environmental Sciences Health Division is now Division of Health Policy and Services; and Department of Social and Rehabilitative Services Developmental Disabilities Division (lead agency for Part C of IDEA) and Rehabilitative/Visual Services Division are now combined into the Division of Disability Services. The references in this report reflect the current titles of State agency departments and divisions.

## III. Context for Project Implementation

In a state like Montana, geography and demographics, personnel characteristics, and organizational structures and procedures for providing Part C and B IDEA services play a major role in shaping both *how* and *what* services are available to students whose disabilities place them into a "low incidence" category such as deaf-blindness.

Montana is the fourth largest state in the country in terms of size (147,046 square miles), but its population of approximately 840,00 places it among the smallest in population. About one-fifth of the state's population lives in three cities separated by great distances - Billings, Great Falls, and Missoula. Other areas of the state are sparsely populated. Forty-seven of Montana's 56 counties meet Popper's (1986) definition of "the American frontier", meaning that there are fewer than six persons per square mile. The remaining nine counties are classified as "rural", with resident/square mile figures ranging from 6 to 99. Vast distances separate towns and cities from one another. Topographically, elevation levels in the state range from 1,820 to 12,799 feet above sea level. Weather conditions frequently prohibit travel through the numerous mountainous regions, and public transportation is extremely limited in most of the state. *Montana exemplifies the descriptor "rural".*

The lead agency for Part C IDEA early intervention services is the Developmental Disabilities Program of the Department of Health and Human Services. Part C services are provided through contracts with seven regional Child and Family Service Provider agencies through out Montana. Services are primarily home-based. Family Support Specialist are the primary service providers for Part C services and these services are augmented a variety of allied health, medical and social service professionals. While Family Support Specialist are required to meet rigorous early intervention certification, they are not required to have speciality training for children who are deaf-blind. Likewise, key allied health professionals (e.g., P.T'.s, O.T'.s, Speech/Language Pathologists) are not equired to have this specific training.

The lead agency for Part B IDEA Special Education Services is the Office of Public Instruction. Approximately 163,000 students are served in 400 public school districts in Montana. The majority of these districts are extremely small, as illustrated by these statistics:

- over half the districts in the state have fewer than 100 students;
- there are 80 one-room schools located in 34 of Montana's 56 counties;
- one county that is approximately the size of Connecticut, has only 316 students in the public schools; and
- ten of the elementary schools in this county are one-room schools, and a single high school, equipped with a dormitory, serves the entire county.

The student population of Montana's schools is largely white (87.8%), with Native Americans comprising the largest (9.6%) ethnic minority group. There are seven sovereign Indian nations/reservations in the state, each with its own distinct language and culture. In 23 public elementary schools and 16 public high schools, over 40 percent of the students are Native American. Very small percentages of African American (.5%), Asian American (0.8%) and Hispanic students (1.4%) are enrolled in Montana's schools. Approximately 12% of the student population is identified as exceptional statewide.

Twenty-one Special Education Cooperatives are located within the state to support local districts in their efforts to provide specialized services to students with disabilities. The predominant services available through coops are related services including speech therapy, school psychology,

physical therapy, occupational therapy. Services also include developmental assessments and screening of vision and hearing of young children. In addition, districts can also avail themselves of inservice training and technical assistance services provided by their Cooperative. Over 80% of Montana's school districts receive these services.

Teacher-training practices in Montana require all teachers to be certified in general education before any other area of specialization can be pursued. Special education expertise is acquired through the completion of an endorsement program, typically a sequence of five courses beyond the general education degree requirements. Thus, all *special educators* in Montana are dually certified. The converse is not true; general education preservice students at the elementary level take one or two special education "survey" courses that typically are limited to awareness level information about disability. Teachers at the secondary level are not required to take any special education coursework. A critical evaluation of the preservice training system relative to the issue of educating students with deaf-blindness suggests the following weaknesses:

- future general educators do not get the amount or type of information that will enhance their ability to respond to the diverse needs of students within the general education setting. Students with low incidence type of disabilities represent the most extreme challenge to a teacher who has received little or no specialized training.
- at the bachelor's level, future special educators are endorsed after completing relatively limited training that does not require substantial "hands on" experiences. Thus, teachers have little preparation to meet the needs of students with a variety of disabilities, particularly those with the most significant needs. Since small schools may only employ one special educator (K-12), frustration, isolation, and burn-out are common among teachers in many rural areas (Helge, 1981, 1984).

The teacher-training structure in Montana is oriented to preparing "generalists". The only masters level special education preparation available in Montana is at Montana State University-Billings. While there is available coursework that focuses on the needs of students with severe disabilities, the only teacher preparation programs with coursework or faculty expertised in deaf-blindness in the western region of the country are located at the University of Arizona, San Diego State University, and San Francisco State University (the closest one is 1,200 miles away from Helena, MT). As a result, the number of in-state people with this specialized expertise is quite limited.

Montana's Council for Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD-B) is the mechanism through which preservice and inservice training for special educators, general educators, and related services personnel is coordinated. In Montana, this is a well-organized and dynamic component of the state's OPI. The CSPD-B Council is involved in strategic planning to ensure that the resources associated with this program are focused on activities relevant at the school level. Toward that end, planning has been decentralized, with the formation of five regional CSPD Teams. These teams are responsible for identifying and responding to the training needs within their area, and are the direct recipients of state dollars for training implementation activities.

In addition, young children and students with deaf-blindness are living throughout the state. Thus, providing training and technical assistance in the most relevant and natural setting requires the Project Coordinator (deaf-blind specialist) to travel great distances. Likewise, centrally located training events require significant travel and expenses in order for family members, Family Support Specialists, teachers and related services personnel to participate. While distance education opportunities are increasing in Montana, there are drawbacks (e.g., some training requires hands-on demonstrations; METNET sites still require significant travel for participants). All of the factors outlined present challenges to providing training and technical assistance services for individuals concerned with young children and students with dual sensory impairments.

Two other events impacted the Project. The reauthorization of IDEA did impact the activities of OPI and specifically impacted the relationship between IDEA and the foundation for deaf-blind services in the law. Montana's Part C and B IDEA services were monitored by the U.S. Department of Education in the 1998/1999 school year. The Department of Public Health and Human Services (Part C lead agency) and OPI (Part B lead agency) have not received the final monitoring reports, however, the exit interviews with the respective Monitoring Team Leaders provided insights about the preliminary findings. In brief, the Part C Team Leader said all the finding indicate that Montana has one of the best Part C service systems they have reviewed out of 19 states. While there will not be any area noted for corrective action, the Team Leaders did "brainstorm" some ways that services could even be more improved. The Part B Team Leader indicated that there were several areas of concern relative to Part B services. Two key areas that would enhance services for students with deaf-blindness concern improving the availability of more related services provided directly by related service personnel, and transition services to reflect a coordinated set of services.

## IV. Project Accomplishments (Details for the final reporting period)

The accomplishments of the State Project are summarized relative to each of the project goals and objectives for the time period of March 1, 1998 to September 30, 1999 which includes a portion of the third project year (March 1 - September 30, 1998) and all of the fourth project year (October 1, 1998 - September 30, 1999). Thus, this document covers the time period since the submission of last performance report. The three previous performance reports provide details concerning the Project accomplishment relative to the goals and objectives from October 1, 1995 through March 1, 1998. The project goals, objectives and activities are listed in section 2.1.1 The Projects Goals, Objectives and Activities on pages 29 through 40 in the approved application.

**Goal 1. Public Awareness**

To provide essential information to families, family support organizations, early intervention agencies, education facilities, medical facilities, institutions of higher education, professional organizations, and state agencies concerning services and resources for children who are deaf-blind and their families.

**Objective 1.1 Implement a variety of methods and procedures designed to increase awareness of the services and resources for children who are deaf-blind and their families.**

The dissemination of Project awareness materials has continued according to the type of activities listed in the application (see section 2.1.1, p.31). The process of Project dissemination was strengthened through the development of a formal relationship with Parents Let's Unite for Kids (PLUK) which is Montana's parent training and support program and serves as a key resource for families who include children with disabilities. In addition to their capacity as a resource center, they also distribute a information filled newsletter with a circulation over 4,000 and is free to family members, including families with children who are deaf-blind. Now, PLUK is an additional dissemination center for the State Project. Thus, dissemination is an on-going activity and new means of dissemination are being employed.

In addition, the Project initiated planning activities with human services, health services, Head Start and school personnel on the Northern Cheyenne Indian and Fort Peck reservations to enhance child find activities on the reservation and the surrounding area, and to increase awareness about the Project's referral process and services. This is part of the activities conducted in association with the Great Plains Regional Alliance pilot project.

Further, Montana's Family Support Services Advisory Council (interagency coordinating council for Part C) in preparation for federal monitoring of Part C services identified public awareness as the primary area for enhancing early intervention services. The Council is working to strengthen statewide public awareness which in turn directly benefits public awareness about the Project since they are one of the primary referral sources for young children who have or are at risk for deaf-blindness. To further these efforts, the Rural Institute on Disabilities, contractual partners with OPI on the Deaf-Blind Projects, were successful in obtaining one of four Child Find Demonstration grant awards (CFDA 84.324T) from the U.S. Department of Education. This grant is designed to enhance local public awareness and child find activities. The model is based on activities piloted on the reservations noted above. Again, this new four-year Child Find Project will augment public awareness for the Deaf Blind Project as well as Part C services.

**Objective 1.2 Develop guidelines to ensure that essential information about the services, resources and referral are accessible to all key constituents.**

All of the activities related to the guidelines have been initiated, but identification of all materials that would reach a wider audience has not been completed. For instance, project personnel continue to support work with key community, education and service leaders on Native American Indian reservations to determine if materials would be more useful if they were converted into specific Native American Indian languages. Activities on the Fort Peck reservation has included development of public awareness materials in local Native American Indian languages. This process is on-going because there are 10 resident tribes on seven reservations (see section 2.1.1, p.31).

**Objective 1.3 Target important constituents, organizations, agencies and locations for dissemination of information concerning services and resources.**

All of the activities related to the target of constituents for dissemination were initiated in previous years (see section 2.1.1, p.31 and p.32). Central to these activities have been expanding targets of dissemination to include additional contacts identified through Montana's Infant and Toddler Part C of IDEA program and PLUK. A key point of public awareness is to inform those individuals and organizations who are most likely be first contacts for families who have a child who is deaf-blind or has dual sensory impairments. Hence, this is an ongoing activity as new contacts are identified and previous contacts are routinely updated.

**Objective 1.4 Coordinate and collaborate with other agencies and organizations for the dissemination of information concerning services and resources for children who are deaf-blind and their families.**

All of these public awareness dissemination activities were initiated in the first project year and continued during the subsequent project years (see section 2.1.1, p.31 and p.32). As noted in the original application, enhanced relationships with Montana's Part C program has increased linkages with other public awareness efforts for young children with disabilities. The State Project is continuing to link and coordinate with those organizations and agencies who are responsible for conducting public awareness and child find campaigns for children who "at risk" for developmental delays and children with disabilities. In addition to the collaboration discussed in Objective 1.1, the Part C participated in several new statewide public awareness campaigns for Healthy Mothers - Healthy Babies and the new CHIPs insurance program for children who do not have or qualify for other types of health coverage.

**Objective 1.5 Conduct formative and summative evaluations of public awareness activities.**

Primary activities in this area are not scheduled to be completed until late in each project year (see section 2.1.1, p.31 and 32, and section 2.4.3 p. 63 and 64). Since the State Project ties into and is coordinated with other public awareness campaigns (i.e., IDEA), it is difficult to assess fully the impact of as it specifically applies to deaf-blind services. However, as Part C and Part B of IDEA evaluate there public awareness activities, the State Project personnel are included and able to determine areas of public awareness that can be enhanced. Further, the State Project personnel work with key stakeholders (e.g., Family Support Services Advisory Council) to further evaluate public awareness activities and their impact. Areas that continue to be of concern include public awareness in certain rural areas of Montana, including Native American Indian reservations. Each year, agencies that are most likely to be first contact with children potentially eligible for Project services, often times need to be reminded about having available and disseminating information about the Project and the Project brochure.

**Goal 2. Identification of Children who are Deaf-blind**

To coordinate child find activities with other state and private agencies in order to seek out, identify and refer children who are or may be at risk for being deaf-blind.

**Objective 2.1 Identify all child find activities coordinated by state and regional agencies, including but not limited to child find and screening activities organized by Part C (formerly Part H) IDEA - Developmental Disabilities Program, Health Policy and Services Division, Child and Family Services Division, and Addictive and Mental Disorders Division of the Department of Public Health and Human Services (formerly the Departments of Social and Rehabilitation Services, Health and Environmental Sciences, Corrections and Human Services and Family Services) a , Part B IDEA - Office of Public Instruction, and Indian Health Services.**

All of the activities of this objective were continued during the reporting period and a list of various child find efforts across educational and human service agencies in Montana was established(see section 2.1.1, p.32). However, it was verified that there are local child find efforts (e.g., local well-child screenings) that are more difficult to find out about because they do not occur on a routine basis. The State Project must relay on links with agencies/schools responsible for other major child find efforts (i.e., Part H and Part B of IDEA) to coordinate their local child identification and screening activities. Further, as noted earlier, some agencies need to be routinely reminded about Project child identification. As part of the Part C self assessment for Federal monitoring, child find was identified as an area that could be improved. As noted in Objective 1.1, the Rural Institute on Disabilities obtained a grant to work with Montana's Part C lead agency and service providers to implement a model of public awareness and child find activities designed to enhance child find activities and outcomes.

**Objective 2.2 Link child find activities and processes for children who are deaf-blind with other state and regional agencies' child find activities.**

All of the activities for this objective were initiated in the first project year and continued in the subsequent project years. Linkages with child find efforts were established, especially with Montana's Part C (formerly Part H) program at the regional level and Part B school services at the LEA level (see section 2.1.1, p.32 and 33). The State Project will continue to work closely with those schools and early intervention agencies as well as create stronger linkages with child find efforts conducted by other agencies (e.g., Head Start, Indian Health Services). These linkages can not be taken for granted and need to be routinely contacted.

**Objective 2.3 Provide training and technical assistance to community service providers, educational personnel and family members, specifically including under-represented groups (e.g., Native American Indians) about screening and child find activities for children who are or may be at risk for being deaf-blind.**

As noted in previous reports and earlier in this report, the State Project continues to participate with the Great Plains Regional Alliance, which received an Optional Pilot Project (Deaf-Blindness), in addressing training and technical assistance needs in this area. Planning and needs assessment activities were initiated (see section 2.1.1, p. 33). The State Project has continued activities in this area on the Northern Cheyenne and Fort Peck Indian Reservations. In most cases, there are local personnel (e.g., public health nurse, early intervention personnel) who can complete basic hearing and vision screening activities. However, some young children who have been screened and determined eligible for Part C services for other reasons than dual sensory impairment/deaf-blindness, later were determined to have significant vision and/or hearing impairments. Hence, further training is still needed to find children as early as possible.

**Objective 2.4 Implement a standardized user friendly, multiple method process for referral to Montana's Project for Children who are Deaf-Blind.**

The six activities linked to this objective were implemented during the first project year and are reviewed routinely (see section 2.1.1, p. 33). These activities have been linked to public awareness and child find efforts established for Part C and Part B IDEA services as well as linking additional referral methods through PLUK, Montana's parent training and support center.

**Objective 2.5 Implement eligibility procedures based on Montana's definition of deaf-blindness that validate placement on Montana's census/child count of Children who are deaf-blind.**

The three activities concerning validation of students with deaf-blindness for inclusion on Montana's census/child count of children who are deaf-blind were implemented in the first project year (see section 2.1.1, p. 33 and 34) and continued in subsequent years. As new children were identified and referred for the census of children who are deaf-blind, steps for validation of inclusion on the census were completed. As noted in previous reports, the State Project Coordinator utilized, starting in the second project year, a more conservative method to verify eligibility and placement on the census. Since the last performance report, children were referred for deaf-blind services.

**Objective 2.6 Conduct formative and summative evaluations of child find activities.**

Primary activities in this area have been initiated but continue to be refined to better evaluate child find activities designed to identify children with deaf-blindness/dual sensory impairments (see section 2.1.1, p.34, and section 2.4.3 p. 65). As noted in previous reports, established child find efforts result in appropriate referrals of children for deaf-blind services, but other children are discovered that appear to be eligible for State Project services but who were not referred through the formal channels. Again, this verifies the necessity to have a continuous focus on child find and on a regular basis, reestablish and strengthen linkages with agencies conducting public awareness and child find activities. As noted in previous objectives, new resources and initiatives are starting in Montana to enhance public awareness and child find campaigns. The Deaf-Blind Projects are included in those initiatives.

**Goal 3. Family Services**

To provide technical assistance and training designed to facilitate family involvement in the education of children who are deaf-blind.

Table 1., Evaluation of Individual Training and Technical Assistance Events, summarizes the satisfaction evaluation of parents, Family Support Specialist (Part C early intervention specialists), special education teachers, etc., for training and technical assistance events that were primarily conducted in relationship to one child/student with dual sensory impairments. The questions on the evaluation pertain to objectives for Goals 3. Family Services and 4. Technical Assistance to Education and Service Provider Personnel. Further, satisfaction ratings are listed by specific categories for the respondents. At the end of each training and technical assistance event about a single child/student, the Project personnel leaves an addressed, postage-paid XX" XX 5" evaluation post card for the service recipient to rate their satisfaction with the services provided. They are asked to fill it out at their convenience and mail it to the Rural Institute on Disabilities where it is recorded and periodically summarized.

**Objective 3.1 Provide Project services to families in a family-centered, culturally sensitive, coordinated, seamless and user-friendly manner.**

The activities concerning this objective were implemented during the first project year and are on-going features of technical assistance and training services for family members (see section 2.1.1, p. 34). These initial assistance activities have resulted in 102 direct technical assistance and/or training events for 281 family members/professionals (working in collaboration with families) since the start of the reporting period. Parents have had opportunities to provide input concerning all Project services and key activities. The Project's Advisory Committee was affiliated with Montana's Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) Council as an official CSPD committee, but there were logistical issues that proved difficult and are being arranged in a different manner for the future.

**Objective 3.2 Provide individualized support for families, including extended and alternative family arrangements, to access necessary resources, support services and agencies.**

All the four activities associated with this objective were initiated in the first project year and have been on-going (see section 2.1.1, p. 34 and 35). Families who could benefit from assistance or individualized arrangements in order to access Project technical assistance and training resources, received support and prior preparations. See Table 1.

**Table 1.**

**Evaluation of Individual Training and Technical Assistance Events**

| Role of Respondent | Question | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| Special Educator | 4.5 | 4.8 | 4.7 | 4.5 | 4.8 | 4 | 4.7 | 4.7 |
| Child and Family Service Provider | 4.7 | 4.8 | 4.7 | 4.7 | 4.7 | 4.6 | 4.9 | 4.8 |
| Regular Educator | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 4 |
| Paraeducator | 3 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| Parent | 4.5 | 4.5 | 4.7 | 4.5 | 4.7 | 4.5 | 4.9 | 4.8 |
| Other | 4.4 | 4.8 | 4.8 | 4.8 | 4.8 | 4.4 | 4.8 | 4.6 |
| **Average - all roles** | **4.4** | **4.7** | **4.7** | **4.5** | **4.7** | **4.3** | **4.8** | **4.7** |

**Questions**

1. Before the visit, I had an opportunity to identify questions or concerns that could be addressed during the visit.
2. I received information that is immediately useful to me.
3. Questions that I had were answered.
4. Information which was provided was clear and understandable.
5. I have learned things I can do to help this child/student.
6. I feel like I have enough information/resources to implement the suggestions provided.
7. The consultant shared information in a helpful and respectful manner.
8. The visit occurred at a time that was convenient for me.

**Rating Scale**

1 = Strongly disagree with statement
5 = Strongly agree with statement

**Objective 3.3 Provide a comprehensive array of technical assistance and training services to families.**

Since the start of this reporting period, 40 home and site visits to provide 135 family members and their home-based service providers with technical assistance (TA) and training services have been arranged and completed (see section 2.1.1, p. 35) . The events centered on: family-professional collaboration and team building; planning and implementing transitions; inclusion of students with deaf-blindness in their regular education classroom; and individualized developmental and educational activities to promote the young child's/students' skills and learning. The Project was represented at the Developmental Disabilities Planning and Advisory Council's Parents Conferences and the Project help support the participation of parents who have a child with dual sensory impairments. Only one training event was specifically designed to work on joint training of family members and professionals. Further, some of the events were to follow-up previous technical assistance and training sessions. See Table 1.

**Objective 3.4 Educate community service and educational personnel to provide services in a family-centered, person-focused and collaborative manner.**

The three activities concerning this objective were implemented during the first project year(see section 2.1.1, p. 35) and continued in subsequent years. This is an area that continues to be a need with the turnover of personnel and working with personnel for the first time who identify these as areas they desire to improve their service and education activities.

**Objective 3.5 Conduct formative and summative evaluations of family services.**

Primary activities in this area were started in the first project year and have continued (see section 2.1.1, p.35 and 36, and section 2.4.3 p. 66) in subsequent years. A more thorough evaluation protocol was established to collect more detailed information from family members concerning referral to and access of deaf-blind services, service delivery including follow-up, and impact of services. In addition to survey information, families participated in interviews with third parties concerning the service issues. Response to survey and interview information collection process was not as fruitful as anticipated, however, the training and technical assistance post card evaluation method continues to produce responses. This information is used to help modify and improve State Project deaf-blind services. See Table 1.

**Goal 4. Technical Assistance to Education and Service Provider Personnel**

To provide technical assistance and training designed to facilitate the implementation of best practices in the provision of education and related services for children who are deaf-blind.

**Objective 4.1 Implement a process for education and service provider personnel to access Project services and resources in a coordinated, seamless, and user-friendly manner.**

The four activities associated with this objective were initiated in the first project year (see section 2.1.1, p. 36) and resulted in 56 technical assistance (TA) and training events involving 124 education and service provider personnel during this reporting period.

**Objective 4.2 Provide a comprehensive array of technical assistance and training services based on innovative and best practice methods.**

All of the activities concerning this objective were implemented in the first project year and were on-going (see section 2.1.1, p. 36 and 37). During the reporting time period, 50 technical assistance and training events were provided for 146 educators and community service providers and 14 of those events were coordinated to promote the inclusion of family members. Each event was individualized to meet the particular needs identified by the participants. Technical assistance and training was provided through a variety of methods and concerned topics relevant to the provision of appropriate services for children who are deaf-blind. Further, additional training was provided through the Optional Pilot Project, including Summer Institutes. Training workshops and conference presentation topics included augmentative communication, assistive technology, orientation and mobility, and social interaction and friendships. See Table 1.

**Objective 4.3 Incorporate "follow-up" activities into the delivery of all technical assistance and training services.**

All three of the activities identified for this objective were implemented during the first project year and were on-going (see section 2.1.1, p. 37). This included arranging and conducting 39 follow-up events during this reporting time period.

**Objective 4.4 Implement procedures to identify, nurture and maintain in-state personnel with expertise in areas of services for children with deaf-blindness.**

All of the scheduled activities for this objective were implemented during the first project year and were on-going (see section 2.1.1, p.37, and section 2.4.3 p. 66). It should be noted that this objective was included in the original application to serve as a link between the State Project and the Optional Pilot Project, Partnerships for Rural Resource Teams Project, submitted by Montana's OPI. Since Montana did receive funding for the Partnerships for Rural Resource Teams Project, most of the activities associated with this State Project objective are expanded on in the other Project.

**Objective 4.5 Conduct formative and summative evaluations of technical assistance and training services.**

Primary activities in this area were scheduled to start later in the first project year and were continued see section 2.1.1, p.37, and section 2.4.3 p. 66). A more thorough evaluation protocol has

been established to collect detailed information from educators and service providers concerning referral to and access of deaf-blind services, service delivery including follow-up, and impact of services. In addition to survey information, education and service personnel have been able to participate in interviews concerning the above issues. This information is being used to modify and improve State Project deaf-blind services.

**Goal 5. Community Coordination and Collaboration**

To promote interagency collaboration, coordination and development of resources devised to educate and support children who are deaf-blind and their families in their schools and communities.

**Objective 5.1 Monitor community coordination and collaboration through the guidance of the Project's Advisory Committee for Services for Children who are Deaf Blind and their Families.**

Activities associated with this objective were implemented in the first project year and were on-going (see section 2.1.1, p. 38). A committee of Montana's CSPD Council was established to serve as the Project's Advisory Committee. The membership of the CSPD/Project Advisory Committee was expanded to include family members who have children who are deaf-blind. In addition, the Advisory Committee included Montana's Part H Coordinator, teacher representative, Physical Therapist, representative from the Montana School for the Deaf and Blind, College Special Education Professor and State Project personnel. Further, Advisory Committee members also served on other Montana councils (e.g., Special Education Advisory Panel, Family Support Services Advisory Council) and served as linkages to share information and coordinate services.

However, there were problems with logistical conflicts in having the opportunity for all Advisory Committee members participate with Advisory Committee activities when they were scheduled at the same time as other committees met and members wanted to attend other meetings. Adjusting the adjusting the Advisory Committee meeting schedule did not improve the situation since many members were not able to meet the day before the CSPD meeting and many were unwilling to serve on a state committee that required 4 to 8 additional days per year. Due to these logistical conflicts, the Project has not been able to benefit from the participation of all the members to the level originally stated in the application. The Advisory Committee will try to recruit new members who are more able to commit to attend the meetings and complete committee activities through other means (e.g., telephone conference calls).

**Objective 5.2 Seek out consumer input and incorporate into planning and implementing services for children who are deaf-blind and their families.**

Activities associated with this objective were implemented in the first project year and continued in the subsequent years (see section 2.1.1, p. 38). In addition to informal feedback that occurs during provision of services, a formal needs assessment and evaluation protocol was implemented that utilized surveys, interviews and post card evaluation to collect specific information

about deaf-blind services in Montana. Several parents who have children with dual sensory parents have become involved with other councils, committees and organizations such as Partners in Policy-Making with DDPAC/PLUK, CSPD, Family Support Services Advisory Council and Special Education Advisory Panel.

**Objective 5.3 Coordinate and collaborate with other local, state, regional, and national agencies and organizations (e.g., Montana's Part C, Part B, CSPD lead agencies, NTAC) in the planning and provision of services for children who are deaf-blind and their families.**

All of the activities concerning this objective were implemented in the first project year and were ongoing (see section 2.1.1, p. 38 and 39). Linkages with Montana's service providers and educators were expanded. The Project maintained involvement with national resource organizations (e.g., NTAC, Helen Keller National Center, Great Plans Regional Alliance). Further, cooperative planning concerning services for children and youth with deaf-blindness and their families has occurred between the State Project and Montana advisory councils concerned with disability issues. The State Project was represented at Special Education Advisory Panel for Part B IDEA, Family Support Service Advisory Council for Part C IDEA, Comprehensive System of Personnel Development Council, State Transition Systems Change Coordinating Council, State School To Work Council, and Developmental Disabilities Planning and Advisory Council. In addition, the Project is represented on Montana's OPI State Improvement Grant/Plan Team established as part of the reauthorization of IDEA. Services for students with low-incidence conditions, including deaf-blindness, was ranked as one of the major priorities for the State Improvement Grant.

As noted in Goals 1. and 2., the Project was involved with development of a successful grant application to enhance Part C public awareness and child find activities in Montana and replication in Oregon. The Rural Institute on Disabilities wrote the grant with the collaboration of the Developmental Disabilities Program (Part C lead agency in the Department of Public Health and Human Services), Family Support Services Advisory Council, Child and Family Service Providers (Part C service agencies), and Teaching Research at Western Oregon University. The Project is involved with the implementation of this new grant.

Collaborative efforts also involved activities with Montana School For The Deaf And Blind and Visual Services Program of the Department of Health and Human Services. In order to develop plans for enhancing services, the Project has brought together a group of individuals representing diverse perspectives concerning training and technical assistance about services and supports for children and young adults with dual sensory impairments which was conducted in cooperation with NTAC.

**Objective 5.4 Conduct formative and summative evaluations of community coordination and collaboration activities.**

Primary activities in this area were initiated in the first project year and are ongoing in subsequent years (see section 2.1.1, p.39, and section 2.4.3 p. 67). The State Project tries to link evaluation of community coordination and collaboration with other key systems evaluations. For instance, the State Project will continue to participate with Montana's self-evaluation of the Part C early intervention program concerning coordination and collaboration in providing services to young children. This is especially important since these agencies are the primary referral sources for infants and toddlers who have dual sensory impairments.

**Goal 6. Project Evaluation and Management**

To evaluate the impact of Project activities on key constituents and to systematically manage the Project based on evaluation information.

**Objective 6.1 Utilize a Advisory Committee for Services for Children who are Deaf Blind and their Families to assist in refining project objectives and activities necessary for the completion of project objectives, evaluations, recommendations for service system modifications, products, and dissemination and utilization of findings and products. (This section primarily concerns the Advisory Committee's role with Project oversight, also see Objective 5.1.)**

As previously noted, a State Deaf-Blind Advisory Committee has been established as a sub-committee of the CSPD and the membership of that committee to includes family members who have children with deaf-blindness (see section 2.1.1, p.39). The Advisory Committee continues to work on the following issues: Getting information about the projects to people who really need to know, including school teachers, related service personnel, and Native Americans and service providers/organizations who serve Indian Reservations; User friendly technical assistance planning and follow-up processes; User friendly evaluation processes to determine if the technical assistance is helpful; and Coordinating efforts to find "common issues" (e.g., training needs, services) with other personnel who serve other low incidence populations. Further, the Advisory Committee sustains its' efforts with establishing needs assessment and evaluation protocols.

**Objective 6.2 Evaluate, summarize and incorporate into the Project management system, the implementation and impact of Project activities and services.**

The scheduled activities for this objective were initiated with the linking of the management and evaluation systems during the first project year and are ongoing (see section 2.1.1, p. 40). Information from the evaluation of Project Goals 1-5 has been used to make modifications in some of the activities related to Project Objectives. At this time, current information supports the continuation of all Project Goals and Objectives.

**Objective 6.3 Manage Project implementation to ensure the timely and effective completion of Project objectives and services.**

The activities concerning this objective were started in the first project year with the routine review and updating of Project objectives, activities and timelines as well as implementation of the Program Planning and Budgeting System (see section 2.1.1, p.40). The Project Coordinator has hired Elizabeth Wegner at .50 FTE as an executive assistant to help with daily Project activities so that the Project Coordinator can devote more time utilizing his expertise in providing technical assistance instead of routine duties (e.g., process travel support for technical assistance and training participants). As noted above, some activities have been modified but the Project Goals and Objectives are still appropriate.

**V. Problems Encountered, Approaches for Solutions, Lessons Learned**

**Child Find, Referral and Tracking Eligible Young Children and Students.** As noted in the report for Goals 1 and 2, public awareness and child find activities are ongoing and must be promoted on a continuous basis. First, these are issues that are tied into Montana's statewide and local systems for these Part C and B IDEA components. With seven early intervention agencies (Part C) and approximately 400 school districts, it takes an ongoing effort to assure that agencies and schools have appropriate information about the State Project and referral procedures to be infused in local public awareness and child find efforts. Two of the key problems appear to be personnel turnover and new staff may not be aware of all the past details for public awareness and child find. Second, agencies and schools always have children and families participating in child find, so they take for granted their efforts in these areas and do not really evaluate how effective their practices are in finding children in a timely manner. It is hoped that the new Child Find grant in Montana will help improve public awareness and child find. The key lesson learned, is that the State Project must always make sure that State Project materials and procedures are disseminated on a routine basis.

While referral from the Part C agencies works well and consistently, it is not always the case with school districts. Several reasons have been identified: (1) lack of awareness of services, (2) some school personnel seem not to take advantage of any "hands on, on-site" technical assistance in their classrooms, (3) some school personnel seem to believe that asking for assistance from any service directly from OPI (e.g., transition) is an indication of "weakness" in their services, and (4) some school personnel feel that they are overloaded with responsibilities that they do not have the time to take advantage of the technical assistance. In addition to increasing awareness about State Project services, assure school personnel that the technical assistance services are designed to meet their specific issues and that the State Project personnel are not in school programs to "monitor" their school program. Further, assure school personnel that they can customize the technical assistance to not only address their issues but when and how technical assistance is provided.

Sometimes the State Project loses track of students in the deaf-blind child count. Reasons include: families moving, students changing teachers or schools within their community, children

assigned to new Family Support Specialists, transition between programs or agencies, and the Deaf-Blind Coordinator's schedule is so filled at certain times of the year, it is hard to maintain contact with all children/students. During the past four years, Montana's child count has fluctuated tremendously for these and other reasons. The Deaf-Blind Coordinator does not include children/students on the deaf-blind child count, if he is not sure of their current residence. This problem is difficult and was not completely solved. However, the Project changed the approach for maintaining contact by providing people with more information about Project long-term services and the benefits of "staying in touch." The Deaf-Blind Coordinator includes a statement/note to teachers and parents as a standard section of the technical assistance visit reports. Also, when children are "lost," previous teachers are contacted in an effort to better track studnets. Increased networking between schools, Part C agencies, the University of Montana, and the Deaf-Blind Project is helping improve our child count efforts. However, as stated before, this is an ongoing problem in our state.

**Collaboration Between Agencies.** Collaboration is a "double-edged" sword because while it can provide positive benefits for the parties involved, it can be difficult and time-consuming at the same time. Challenges include: (1) it can be very time consuming with little gain for services for children/students with deaf-blindness and their families; (2) the timing and speed of getting activities completed varies across agencies and some outcomes take a long time to achieve; (3) most agencies or institutions have their own set of rules and protocols they need to follow which can interfere with collaboration; and (4) the key outcome for collaboration to benefit services for children/students with deaf-blindness and their families may not be a very important priority for the other partners. In this cases, the State Project personnel do not try to change the way other agencies "do business," but emphasize the common goals and outcomes. Project personnel try to key in on how inter-agency collaboration eliminates or diminishes the workload of the partners and how it ultimately derives benefits for children/students and families.

**Some Schools Do Not Request Technical Assistance or Training.** While the provision of technical assistance and training is the most important aspect of Montana's Deaf-Blind State Project, there are a small minority of schools that either do not request services or allow Project personnel to visit, but do not follow through on the of the consultation. The reasons identified for lack of referral to the State Project apply to this situation. As an example, there are times when a child with deaf-blindness transitions from Part C to Part B services, and even though school personnel are provided information concerning previous Project services and the needs of the student are challenging, the school personnel will not access services. To improve this situation, the Deaf-Blind State Project encourages school personnel to tell Project personnel specifically what kind(s) of technical assistance would be of the most assistance. As noted in the original application, The Project provides on-site visitations by the Deaf-Blind State Project Coordinator, technical assistance visits and training by contractors with special areas of expertise, yearly workshops and training events based on previous feedback about, "How can we help?" The Project also disseminates information about our services in different methods so people better understand better the services.

**Lessons Learned**. Change is not easy and asking for help is hard for some people. The biggest lesson learned is that Project personnel cannot assume that people receiving Project services are automatically doing what they were taught and that many school personnel will not, on their own, maintain contact. This is frustrating when through classroom observation, it is clear that ongoing assistance is needed in order to implement an effective educational program for the student. While the parents will continue to request services, school personnel do not. Another lesson reinforced, is that technical assistance needs to happen in a variety of ways depending on the needs and wants of the people who are making the request. Project personnel have learned to accommodate various needs by asking before each visit, direct questions about their needs and what they expect. Again, dissemination of information about Project referral and services is ongoing and that collaboration with other agencies improves awareness and referral for services. The last lesson learned is how to make good use of a very tight budget that is "fair" to all recipients of services from the State Deaf-Blind Project.

**VI. Implications for Policy, Practice and Research.**

OSEP 's operation in terms of implementing and monitoring Federal laws and rules and regulations affects each state tremendously and in many unique ways. From the perspective of some school personnel "in the field," many times they wonder, " Why did they do this/" or "What were they thinking when they implemented this rule?" Typically, professional and parent organizations, state level administrators and university professors seem to provide the most recommendations for OSEP regarding laws and rules and regulations. It is difficult for school level personnel to directly influence important decisions in these areas. OSEP should consider ways to make it easier for school level personnel to provide input concerning these important areas and feedback about what are the needs "out there," in local schools. With that information, OSEP would be better informed to make decisions about writing policies and rules and regulations.

In special education, change is difficult and slow. Indeed, it is hard to complete systems change. While the need for Federal support is needed to change systems to reflect the implementation of current best practices, perhaps these efforts should be for a longer period of time. For instance, perhaps state transition systems change projects should be funded for nine years with the requirement to formally update the state transition plan and activities every three years in order to meet current needs concerning the systems change efforts.

There will be an ongoing need to have a significant Federal focus and resources for providing training and technical assistance to impact local services for children with low incidence conditions and deaf-blindness. These young children and students are only a small percent of the overall special education population, but they require parents, service providers and school personnel to have extraordinary skills to provide high quality developmental and education programs. While strides are being made to impact personnel preparation programs and improve services, without the continued Federal focus, the gains made will quickly disappear.

Further, the funding of research and demonstration grants by OSEP, is a great help. The process and results of research and demonstration grants help people in the field of deaf-blindness find more and better ways to serve this population and their families. With these research grants, the providers of technical assistance and training can continue to update our knowledge and information in our field. Applying knowledge and expertise gained through research and demonstration projects is one of the most important tools and resources that we receive from OSEP. We strongly encourage OSEP to continue funding deaf-blind research and demonstration projects as **separate entities from other categories of disability, not as part of a broader umbrella**.